

Emergence Theory-Based Curriculum to Teach Compromise Skills to Students

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Abstract

This study addresses the compromise skills that are taught to students diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and related social and communication deficits. A private school in the southeastern United States implemented an emergence theory-based curriculum to address these skills, yet no formal analysis was conducted to determine its effectiveness. Guided by cognitive development and constructivist theories, a concurrent, mixed methods, case study design was used to investigate the impact of this curriculum on teaching compromise skills to middle school students with ASD and related deficits. For the qualitative sequence, teacher observations and compromise interventions from eight participants were open coded and analyzed thematically. The frequency of each thematic occurrence was analyzed using descriptive statistics. For the quantitative sequence, an ANCOVA and descriptive statistics were used to analyze posttest scores between a treatment group that used emergence theory-based curriculum and a control group, while controlling for pretest scores. Three most frequently occurring themes emerged regarding teachers' need (a) to understand the cognitive deficits exhibited by students, (b) for further instruction in emergence theory-based curriculum, and (c) for opportunities to plan lessons together using emergence theory. Moreover, the ANCOVA revealed a significant interaction between the pretest scores and the curriculum used. This study indicated that importance for remediating cognitive deficits related to compromise within the population of students with ASD and improving educator understanding and success in working with this student population.

Keywords: autistic spectrum disorders, emergence theory-based curriculum, teaching compromise skills, ASD Compromise, emergence theory

Introduction

Despite the many successes, community-based practitioners involved in CCE have

faced a number of challenges. While community groups typically enter into research relationships being promised mutually beneficial outcomes, studies show that academics and their institutions often benefit far more from these kinds of partnerships (Alcantara et al. 2015; Bortolin 2011; Cronley, Madden & Davis 2015). For community partners, barriers to participating in CCE can include limited time and resources to fully engage (Keyte 2014; Lantz et al. 2001), minimal support for building and maintaining partnerships (Dorow, Stack-Cutler & Varnhagen 2011; Petri 2015; Sandy & Holland 2006), power imbalances (Schwartz et al. 2016), lack of trust (Lantz et al. 2001; Petri 2015) and high levels of staff and volunteer turnover (Keyte 2014; Schwartz et al. 2016; Van Devanter et al. 2011). Despite recognition of these challenges, institutional structures are typically designed to support academics (Cronley, Madden & Davis 2015; Dempsey 2010; Ward & Wolf-Wendel 2000). Studies have also identified significant barriers faced by academics when participating in CCE, including having limited time and resources and being discouraged from community-engaged pedagogies through tenure and promotion structures (Levkoe, Brial & Danier 2014). While most responses tend to occur on a case-by-case basis, some have called for more institutionalised and sustained support mechanisms (Chen 2013; Dorow, Stack-Cutler & Varnhagen, 2011).

CCE brokers have emerged as one response to these challenges. In this article, we broadly describe brokering initiatives as coordinating mechanisms that act as intermediaries between community-based organisations and academic institutions with an aim to develop collaborative and sustainable partnerships. A broker is an individual or organisation that helps connect and support relationships and share knowledge. While many different forms of brokering initiatives have emerged, there has been little synthesis or analysis on the various features of these initiatives that contribute to successful partnerships. Most brokering initiatives share a common goal of fostering relationships be-

tween community and campus partners; yet, they tend to be heterogeneous in their motivations, mandates, organisational structures, target groups, activities, and the sectors they serve. Because brokering initiatives differ on so many dimensions, it is necessary to consider their similarities and differences and assess which elements may be valuable for a particular type of CCE.

In this article, we present a framework for comparative analysis that identifies the different features, roles and activities of CCE brokering initiatives. This framework provides an analytical tool for academics and community-based practitioners to reflect on how the different characteristics of brokering initiatives may contribute to successful CCE partnerships. We begin by summarising the relevant literature, describing key features of CCE brokers, their different functions, and the various factors for success and challenges they face.

Describing and differentiating CCE brokering initiatives

Brokering initiatives aim to support participants at different stages of a partnership and vary depending on their structures, targeted populations and specific activities. Experiences of CCE tend to be context-specific and a CCE broker's role is dependent on the specific project and the needs and assets of each partner. Brokering initiatives must also be flexible and open to change depending on the phase of the relationship. Tennyson (2005) identified three key differences, which provide a basis for understanding how brokering initiatives work within one of the partnering organisations and taking responsibility for preparing and conditioning the different actors, representing the organisation for the duration of the partnership, and managing various aspects of the collaboration. Internal brokers bring together relevant partners but may also share in decision-making throughout a project. These functions can be compared to those of external brokers who may be contracted by the partners to set up agreements, build capacity, and/or maintain and track ongoing effectiveness. External brokers support partners and equip them

with tools to ensure the project is moving forward, but tend to take on little, if any, decision-making responsibility. Second, a broker can be an individual or a team working within or outside one of the partner organisations and tasked with building relationships on behalf of the organisation.

Third, proactive brokers initiate and build partnerships, while reactive brokers coordinate partnerships or implement decisions on an organisation's behalf. While some CCE brokers play a key role in developing a partnership, others support a partnership after its initiation. The three differences identified by Tennyson demonstrate that brokers can take on many roles, depending on the particular partners' needs.

Besides recognising the many differences, Tennyson and Baksi (2016) point to a series of common roles and activities among brokers. These include supporting partners throughout the phases in the partnership cycle from scoping and building (e.g. providing outreach and opportunities to engage, managing expectations), managing and maintaining (e.g. facilitating dialogue and governance arrangements, problem-solving), reviewing and revising (e.g. establishing and implementing an ongoing evaluation plan, supporting changes to the partnership) to sustaining outcomes (e.g. knowledge mobilisation, celebrating achievements, managing closure/next steps). Given the variation in the needs of partners and partnership phases, brokers are likely to take on many roles within and across projects, developing a suite of skills to support and benefit partnerships. While some brokering initiatives take on a single role across community-campus partnerships, such as making an initial connection between two partners, others assume a combination of roles, supporting partners throughout the life of a project.

Specific to community-campus projects, CCE brokers act as an intermediary between

community-based organisations and academic institutions. They have been shown to support community and academic partners in designing and implementing a project, establishing initial connections, delivering skills training, problem-solving, supervising students' community-engaged research and learning activities, evaluating a project's impact, and using results to improve future programs while contributing to positive changes in communities (Keating & Sjoquist 2000; Phipps, Johnny & Wedlock 2015; Tennyson 2014). CCE brokers have also promoted learnings and insights, and addressed concerns of power and resource imbalance by ensuring community and campus partners share control equitably (Keating & Sjoquist 2000; Phipps, Johnny & Wedlock 2015). In addition, because community organisations and universities face high levels of personnel turnover, CCE brokers can help by sustaining a project over the long term (Keating & Sjoquist 2000). To avoid leaving community-based organisations with unfinished projects, CCE brokers can help overcome constraints of an academic schedule by continuing to complete tasks after the end of a term.

In particular, brokering initiatives can be an accessible and responsive point of contact (Keating & Sjoquist 2000). For example, community-based organisations have expressed interest in having platforms to share research needs and interests, connect with academics and learn about opportunities for professional development (Dorow, Stack-Cutler & Varnhagen 2011; Tryon & Stoecker 2008). Brokering initiatives use physical platforms that include providing accessible office space and community workspaces, and staging events that bring partners and other stakeholders together. They also use virtual platforms such as websites, forums and matchmaking databases to bring diverse partners together to share ideas and

information, especially when they are not in the same place. Lacking, however, is an understanding of how these different activities meet partners' needs and the opportunities and limitations faced by CCE brokers when developing collaborations.

Factors for success and challenges of brokering initiatives

In this section, we draw on the existing scholarly literature to highlight factors for success and challenges in initiating and maintaining brokering initiatives and CCE partnerships.

Factors for Success

During the early stages of developing a brokering initiative, significant planning and investment is required (Tryon & Ross 2012). To improve the chances for success when setting up a brokering initiative, Pauzé and Level 8 Leadership Institute (2013) stressed the importance of first identifying the goals of the brokering initiative and then selecting a governance structure accordingly. Further, studies have found that brokering initiatives can benefit from having more formalised administrative infrastructure (Keating & Sjoquist 2000), a clear definition of their relationship with partnerships (Tennyson 2005), established guidelines and tools to address partners' needs (Phipps, Johnny & Wedlock 2015) and flexibility in providing long-term support (Dorow, Stack-Cutler & Varnhagen 2011).

CCE brokers must also give significant

There are several pitfalls that can affect the success of brokering initiatives. One common challenge occurs when CCE brokers fail to find the right balance between directing the partnership and letting the partners lead. If brokers hold too tightly to their own ideas, it can be detrimental to the partnership (Partnership Brokers Association 2012). Thus, it is important for CCE brokers to know when to step back (Evans & McClinton-Brown 2016).

Another common challenge for CCE brokers is having to navigate project partners' perceptions and assumptions of research in general, and those of brokers in particular. For instance, while internal brokers may be

well-informed and have experience working through organisational issues, partners may perceive them as biased in favour of their own organisation's way of operating and reluctant to accept new ideas. External brokers can be impartial to organisational politics, while partners may view them as being too distant and less committed when difficulties arise (Tennyson 2005). Because CCE brokers can be situated within or outside a partnership or community, they must proactively address partners' concerns.

Limited resources or a lack of core funding can also challenge the ability of a broker to provide useful services to sustain partnerships and projects (Naqshbandi et al. 2011). Without consistent funding sources, CCE brokers tend to devote significant effort towards grant writing (Baquet 2012; Keating & Sjoquist 2000). Keating and Sjoquist (2000, pp. 155–156) found that, in some instances, 'the choice of projects that are undertaken is largely determined by whatever kinds of projects are popular with funding agencies. The needs of communities can be overlooked if they do not require the kinds of projects that funding agencies are willing to underwrite.' The reluctance of academic and community participants to participate in time-consuming projects that do not yield outputs that are directly beneficial (e.g. publications, funding, policy change) can challenge CCE brokers. When project partners feel overburdened by excessive meetings, participation and enthusiasm within community advisory committees has been found to decrease (Keating & Sjoquist 2000). Of note, just as community and academic partners interested in CCE struggle to find sufficient resources, brokers too are not immune to these challenges.

Despite the valuable insights generated in the literature thus far, limited documentation exists about the specific role CCE brokers play and ways they can establish and maintain more mutually beneficial partnerships. In response, we present an analytical framework to articulate the potential contributions of brokering initiatives to community-campus partnerships. We reflect on learnings from our review, highlight the opportunities and

limitations of our analytical framework, and provide suggestions for future research and practice.

A review of community-campus brokering initiatives

The purpose of this review was to examine a sample of brokering initiatives, evaluate the commonalities and differences, and gain a better understanding of their contributions to successful community-campus partnerships. The initial research for this article was completed as part of the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement Research partnership (CFICE; see <https://carleton.ca/communityfirst/>). We began by compiling a list of brokering initiatives through online searches of community organisations and academic institutions. Search terms included 'broker' and 'brokerage' by themselves and each combined with 'partnership', 'community-university partnership', 'community-campus partnership', 'community-based research', 'community-engaged research', and 'community-driven'. From our search, we selected brokering initiatives that fell within our broad definition presented in the introduction to this article.

A framework for analysis

The brokering initiatives we reviewed revealed a range of services, focusing on a variety of partners and thematic areas. In considering the commonalities and differences, we identified variation in two key areas. First, from examining the different attributes by identifying affiliation, principle purpose and who received the primary benefit, and comparing this information, we generated five separate categories that delineate the basic structural allegiance of each brokering initiative: (1) community-based, (2) university-based, (3) community-university-based, (4) resource-based, and (5) brokering networks. Second, we classified brokering initiatives into four key dimensions that consider the kinds of activities being undertaken. The-

We shared an initial list with a number of academics and community-based practitioners involved in CCE work to ensure accuracy and identify additional brokering initiatives we may have missed. From our review, we selected a sample of 23 different brokering initiatives within Canada, the US and the UK. While the brokering initiatives we reviewed varied significantly, the key criterion for inclusion in this study was that each brokering initiative's mandate was to initiate and/or maintain partnerships between community and academic partners for the purpose of community-engaged teaching and research. For each initiative, we developed a profile, which included information gathered from websites and in some cases informal discussions with staff to obtain detailed descriptions of their work. Using cross-case analysis (Patton 2015), we categorised the information about each brokering initiative and established a classification system. After analysing the 23 brokering initiatives, we discontinued our search for new examples because we were no longer finding new information or codes to add to the dataset (Fusch & Ness 2015).

se categories include (1) level of engagement, (2) type of platform, (3) scale of activities, and (4) area of focus. We then describe the categories within the analytical framework in which to situate different brokering initiatives. Following this description, we highlight ways this framework might be used to help inform decisions about the establishment, development and long-term sustainability of brokering initiatives.

Part 1: Structural Allegiance

Table 1 provides a description of each of the five categories of structural allegiance to indicate who CCE brokers are, what they do and the impact of their work, together with examples of the different brokering initiatives we reviewed.

Community-based brokering initiatives are rooted in communities and their primary purpose is to provide opportunities for community organisations to collaborate with academics and/or professional researchers on projects that address community objectives. The initiatives we reviewed worked with individuals and organisations in the public, private and/or non-profit sectors to accomplish a range of tasks, such as defining research questions and developing proposals, making initial connections with potential academics and other research partners, managing community-driven research projects, and providing training and mentoring in community-based research for all participants involved. Brokers pay particular attention to each community's needs and work to ensure the community's priorities drive the project. Brokers work with partners to make sure knowledge is co-created and projects are action-oriented, meaning that partners can use findings to make positive changes within their communities. Brokers build the capacity of community partners and community members by collaboratively developing training opportunities and resources. Stakeholders often include staff members and volunteers from community-based organisations, community residents, marginalised groups, academic institutions and government ministries.

One example of a community-based brokering initiative is the Centre for Community Based Research (www.communitybasedresearch.ca/). Located in Waterloo, Canada, it is an independent non-profit organisation which aims to promote collaborative approaches to the co-production of knowledge and innovative solutions to community needs. The Centre is committed to social justice and employs community researchers with insider perspectives. It uses a participatory and action-oriented approach, bringing people together with diverse expertise to contribute to positive community change. A second example is Vibrant Communities Canada (<http://www.vibrantcanada.ca/>) which engages a pan-Canadian audience to connect people, organisations, businesses and government to reduce poverty in Canada. Their

efforts are community-driven and focus on supporting solutions to reducing poverty. Members connect through in-person events and online opportunities, including joining discussion groups or learning communities, contributing blog posts and searching member profiles.

University-based brokering initiatives typically aim to encourage the university population to engage in CCE through training, partnership matching, funding and ongoing support. These kinds of models may support initiatives such as science shops, service-learning courses, community-based research projects and community outreach services. Many of them also offer support for community-based organisations working with academics by providing a range of services such as facilitating initial connections and partnership development, and offering templates for partnership agreements, financial and human resources and troubleshooting on an ongoing basis. Academic institutions typically house and fund university-based brokers to meet institutional needs. While community partners play an important role in projects working with academic faculty or students, a key purpose of these brokering initiatives is to ensure academics have opportunities to conduct research and learn within community organisations.

The Community Engaged Scholarship Institute (www.cesinstitute.ca/) is one example of a university-based brokering initiative. It is located in Guelph, Canada, and acts as a hub for engaged scholarship within the University of Guelph and the broader community. Staff members work with faculty members and students, community-based organisations and government, building capacity for participation in community engagement and social innovation projects. The Institute leverages resources, builds and maintains partnerships, and addresses obstacles to participating in community-engaged research. Another example is University-Community Partnerships (<http://ucp.msu.edu/>). Located in East Lansing, US, it provides a range of services for developing research networks among campus partners at Michigan State University and community partners. Staff match university partners interested in working with a com-

munity group or partner on a grant proposal or maintaining a long-term campus partnership with a community group. University-Community Partnerships balances university and community needs and priorities, promoting projects that provide mutual benefits for all partners, build capacity in communities and encourage long-term partnerships within research networks.

As a hybrid of the previous two categories, community-university-based brokering initiatives are often managed by a team of academic staff, students and/or faculty, as well as community-based organisational representatives. Initiatives in this category are typically driven by both community and academic partners, although it is common to see explicit reference towards prioritising community objectives and goals. These types of brokering initiatives typically operate using a mix of resources from postsecondary institutions and external grant funding.

An example of a community-university-based brokering initiative is the Helpdesk of the Community University Partnership Programme (www.brighton.ac.uk/business-services/community-partnerships/index.aspx), housed at the University of Brighton in the UK. The Helpdesk's work is community-driven and collaborative, with an emphasis on ensuring that community and academic partners are able to build equitable relationships and gain mutual benefit (Rodriguez & Millican 2007). It acts as a gateway to the university for both representatives from community-based organisations enquiring about funding for starting up a research project and faculty members who might have relevant research interest in collaborating on a project; and as a contact point for university staff and students interested in making contact with community-based organisations for collaborative research and teaching purposes. Initiated through philanthropic seed funding, the Helpdesk currently receives the majority of its funding through its university host. Another example is the

Trent Community Research Centre (www.trentcentre.ca/) located in Peterborough, Canada. The Centre is community-based, with project proposals prioritising community needs coming from community-based organisations. Brokers match Trent University students seeking to engage in community-based projects as volunteers or to fulfil part of their course work with community partners to conduct community-based research projects. They ensure that community partners' priorities drive the project, as well as supporting the university students throughout the project.

Resource-based brokering initiatives include grant programs that provide resources to community-based organisations and academic researchers and/or institutions that aim to address key challenges through research and action. While some resource-based brokering initiatives simply provide monetary resources, others prefer to play a more active role in the partnership by taking on management responsibilities and/or offering extended support services such as training and knowledge mobilisation services. For example, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au_sujet/partnerships-partenariats/index-eng.aspx) offers a series of grant programs to support partnerships between academics at different universities, as well as between businesses and non-profit organisations. Funds are granted to carry out research, training and knowledge mobilisation activities using approaches that involve partners collaborating and sharing leadership. Funds can be used to establish new partnerships, test partnership approaches and expand established partnerships. As a second example, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (www.publicengagement.ac.uk/), located in Bristol, UK, supports universities throughout the UK to increase how often and how well they engage in community-based research

and learning activities. It works with campus staff members and students to develop skills for community-engagement activities and offers training sessions (e.g. funding, impact, evaluation) and consultancy to researchers, research managers and staff members in community-based organisations.

Finally, brokering networks, the broadest of the brokering initiative categories, describe initiatives that tend to operate independently to foster relationships through a series of mechanisms. With brokering networks taking on a range of formal and informal structures, they often require little commitment from members and minimal resources to sustain. Networks can also work across geographies to provide a channel for sharing information, resources and ideas (Ontario Health Communities Coalition n.d.). Brokering networks offer opportunities to develop partnerships, collaborate on projects and share information in a more indirect way than the other four structures.

The Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (www.ccphealth.org/) is a membership-based CCE network that provides numerous opportunities to promote and connect communities and academic institutions around health equity and social justice (Community-Campus Partnerships for Health 2017). Through their website, multiple listservs and biennial conference, the network mobilises knowledge, provides training and technical assistance, conducts research, builds coalitions and advocates for supportive policies. As a brokering network, it unites community practitioners and academics from diverse fields around community-based participatory research principles and practices. On the other hand, the Canadian Rural Research Network (<http://rural-research-network.blogspot.ca/>) acts as a hub for rural

stakeholders across Canada, including academics, practitioners, formal and informal community groups, and government officials, to share research outputs. Members can stay up-to-date on rural research, connect with various rural stakeholders, and develop and maintain research partnerships. The Network has no budget, but is sustained by its members who serve on various committees.

Conclusion

While this framework provides a valuable tool for understanding and evaluating brokering initiatives, it is not intended to be static. In most cases, we found that the categories were not fixed and that many of the brokering initiatives we examined took on more than one of the structural allegiances and/or dimensions simultaneously. This speaks to the context in which many of these brokering initiatives operate (e.g. reacting/responding to changing funding realities, program priorities of community organisations, emerging/unanticipated needs, etc.). Also, as technology changes along with the needs of CCE, new tools are being developed that may require different kinds of frameworks to understand and interpret CCE activities. Thus, while we compared brokering initiatives in order to understand their different attributes, we are not advocating a standardised approach to evaluation. Our research and experience leads us to suggest that brokering initiatives must be context-specific and respond to the needs of both community and academic partners. However, we need mechanisms to support community-campus partnerships in a more institutional and sustained way. It is our hope that the analytical framework will make a meaningful contribution to this endeavour.

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